

31. The system of claim 30, further comprising a guide wire for guiding placement of the at least three tissue dilators.

32. The system of claim 30, further comprising bone graft material positionable in a spinal disc space between the adjacent vertebrae.

33. The system of claim 30, wherein the elongated fixation element is a plate. --

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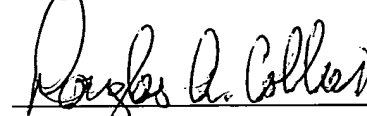
#### REMARKS

The present application includes claims 1-19 pending. Original claims 1-17 have been cancelled. New claims 20-32 are presented herein. Consideration of the present application in view of the foregoing amendments is hereby solicited.

The title has been amended to more directly reflect the subject matter claimed in the present application. The specification has been amended to include the chain of the priority claim of the present application.

These amendments are not believed to introduce new matter or limit the scope of coverage available under the doctrine of equivalents. Attached hereto is page number 8 entitled "VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE." Consideration of the present application, as amended and now including claims 18-33, is respectfully requested. Favorable examination and allowance of the present application is hereby solicited.

Respectfully submitted:



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**VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE**

**IN THE TITLE:**

The current title was deleted and replaced with the following:

--SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR FIXATION OF ADJACENT VERTEBRAE--

**IN THE SPECIFICATION:**

The following paragraph was inserted on page 1 after the title and before the heading "Background of the Invention":

--This application is a continuation of application Number 09/042,910, filed March 17, 1998, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 6,033,406; which is a continuation of application No. 08/677,135, filed July 9, 1996, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,728,097; which is a division of application 08/437,523 filed in May 9, 1995, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,569,248; which is a continuation of application No. 08/116,351 filed September 2, 1993, now abandoned; which is a continuation of application No. 07/938,708 filed September 1, 1992, now abandoned; which is a division of application No. 07/852,577 filed March 17, 1992, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,171,279. --

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Claims 1-17 have been cancelled without prejudice.

Claims 20-33 have been added.